

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

26TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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HINCHEY LAUDS AGRICULTURE SPENDING BILL PASSED BY SUBCOMMITTEE

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) today announced that Agriculture Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2003 contains important funding for New York and the 26th Congressional District, including the restoration of funds for research at Cornell University, technical assistance for the (New York City) Watershed Agriculture Council and the Cayuga Lake Watershed, and funding for Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs. As a member of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, Hinchey was responsible for including these items in the bill.

"This spending plan represents a great improvement over the budget the White House requested for the Agriculture Department," said Hinchey. "It doesn't do everything I would have liked, but it does restore some crucial funding that the president was planning to cut. I am particularly pleased that I was able to reinstate funding for important agricultural research being conducted at Cornell. The watershed money in the Catskills and Cayuga Lake is also critical."

With Hinchey's strong support, the Agriculture Appropriations bill increases spending for education, research and extension activities for the first time in three years. It also restores funding for several watershed restoration programs that the president's budget cut. It provides more money for the Women, Infants and Children program than the White House had requested as well. The Food and Drug Administration is given a significant increase to inspect imported food as part of the homeland security effort.

President Bush had proposed eliminating congressional earmarks from the budgets of the Agriculture Research Service (ARS), the Cooperative State Research Education & Extension Service (CSREES), and the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). This would have endangered millions of dollars in research funds for Cornell University. Hinchey successfully fought to keep congressional control of the funding and to increase funding levels in all three programs.

Hinchey also successfully requested \$650,000 for the Watershed Agriculture Council for technical assistance and perpetual stewardship of easements on farms in the New York City watershed. He also persuaded his colleagues on the committee to direct the Natural Resources Conservation Service to fund the Cayuga Lake Watershed project.

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The Bush Administration had also proposed eliminating funding for nutrition programs have greatly benefited farmers, senior citizens and low-income families in New York. The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides low-income women, infants and children with vouchers to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets during the local growing season. The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides the same service for low-income individuals who are at least 60 years old.

New York is the number one participant in these programs in terms of both farmers and beneficiaries, ranking highest in the country in total purchases under the programs. Hinchey spoke out against the president's plan to eliminate funding for these programs and successfully fought to have it restored. The WIC program is funded at \$25 million and the seniors' program is funded at \$15 million for FY 2003.

"Farmers' markets are assets to their communities," Hinchey added. "They bring people together, provide an important connection with the land, and give city dwellers a sense of where their food comes from. These programs make it easier for farmers' markets to flourish. They also help farmers by putting 100 percent of these food dollars into their pockets."

The Agriculture Subcommittee is one of thirteen subcommittees of the House Appropriations Committee, each of which is responsible for determining a portion of federal discretionary spending. Now that it has passed the subcommittee, the Agriculture spending bill will next be considered by the entire Appropriations Committee, which is expected to vote after the Independence Day recess.